

4-1-2005

Assessment of Ecuadorian Viewpoints Concerning the Gutiérrez Administration and Current Political Issues

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Assessment of Ecuadorian Viewpoints Concerning the Gutiérrez Administration and
Current Political Issues



SIT Spring 2005
Ecuador Comparative Ecology and Conservation
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15 May 2005
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Acknowledgements

Above all, thank you to my advisor Guillermo Navarro Jiménez for providing me with political background and for accepting to help with the project on such short notice. Thank you to Jesús Rivas for looking ahead and for helping me meet Don Jiménez. Thank you also to Leonore Cavallero for helping me make plans for Guayaquil. Last but not least, thank you to Brooke for being so patient and listening to me debate about whether or not to change my project, and for all the great advice.

Abstract

During a period of eight days, surveys addressing the Gutiérrez administration and several current political issues were conducted and personal observations were made in the two Ecuadorian cities of Quito and Guayaquil, representing the Sierra and Coastal regions, respectively. It was found that the majority (61%) was not in agreement with Gutiérrez's government while he was president, and the same percentage was also in agreement with his departure from office.

Resumen

Durante un periodo de ocho días, encuestas sobre el gobierno de Gutiérrez y algunas cuestiones actuales políticas y observaciones personales fueron llevadas a cabo en las dos ciudades ecuatorianas de Quito y Guayaquil, representando las regiones de la Sierra y la Costa, respectivamente. Los resultados mostraron que la mayoría (61%) no estuvo de acuerdo con el gobierno de Gutiérrez mientras que era presidente, y el mismo porcentaje también estuvo de acuerdo con su salida de la presidencia.

Introduction

Study Site

Geography and Background

Ecuador, a country that straddles the equator, is located in the northwestern part of the South American continent (Appendix 1). With an area of 283,560 sq km, it is one of the smallest countries. Ecuador is bordered by Colombia on the north and east, Peru on the south and east, and the Pacific Ocean on the west (CountryWatch 2004).

A land of extreme biological and human diversity, Ecuador consists of four main regions- the Amazon, the Sierra, the Coast, and the Galápagos Islands. In addition to climatic diversity due to elevation, Ecuador's relation to the equator causes different climatic conditions than those found in other tropical areas. Two parallel ranges of the Andes Mountains run directly through the center of Ecuador, effectively creating physical borders and giving definition to the three mainland regions of the country (Microsoft Corporation 1997-2005).

The city of Quito is the capital of the Pichincha province as well of as the country. Located in the Sierra highlands, Quito is the oldest capital in South America and one of the highest in the world. Quito is known as a cultural center rather than an economic center. The city lies in a valley at the base of the Pichincha volcano, between the two ranges of the Andes. Quito has an altitude of 10,000 feet and is located just 22 miles south of the equator. The city had a population of 466,300 people in 2004 (CountryWatch 2004).

The port city of Guayaquil is Ecuador's largest city and most important industrial and commercial center. Located in the Coastal region, Guayaquil is the capital of the Guayas province. In addition to its approximately 2,044,700 million inhabitants, Guayaquil is also home to many foreign residents and businesses. The city lies on the west bank of the Guayas River, about 60 kilometers from where the river empties into the Pacific Ocean at the Gulf of Guayaquil. Guayaquil is Ecuador's most important seaport-about 80% of the country's imports pass through here, and more than 50% of exports are also handled here (CountryWatch 2004).

Demographics

The Ecuadorian population is made up of people of indigenous, European, and African descent, along with a small percentage of recent immigrants. Indigenous Ecuadorians are most represented by the pre-Incan Quichua peoples, while Afro-Ecuadorians are the descendants of African slaves. The vast majority of people are known as mestizo, a combination of indigenous and Spanish ancestry.

As of 2004, Ecuador had a population of 12,664,700, with the largest percentage of people living in the Sierra and Coast regions. In the Sierra, the population is predominantly indigenous, while the Coast is comprised mostly of mestizos and Afro-Ecuadorians. While the Sierra is Ecuador's administrative center, the Coast is the most densely populated region, due to recent migration to its large urban centers.

While Spanish and Roman Catholicism are the official language and religion of Ecuador, many native languages are still spoken, and many indigenous peoples maintain a religion that is a mix of Christian and native customs. As of this year, approximately 93.1 percent of Ecuador's population is literate. Education is free and mandatory from age 5 to 14. However, only 59 percent of children attend secondary school, and even less attend university (Microsoft Corporation 1997-2005).

Government

Since Ecuador's independence from Spanish rule in 1822, the country's government system has alternated between civilian rule and military dictatorship. The majority of Ecuador's political conflicts involve disputes among groups in the upper class, which controls the vast majority of the country's wealth and political power.

Ecuador has a republican government system, consisting of a directly elected president, a unicameral National Congress whose members are popularly elected by the 21 provinces, and a Supreme Court whose members are appointed by the Congress. The country is governed by a constitution established in 1998. It provides for four-year terms for the president, vice president, and members of Congress, while members of the Supreme Court are appointed for six-year terms. Voting is mandatory for all Ecuadorians who are literate and between the ages of 18 and 65. Ecuador's two traditionally important political parties are the Conservative Party and the Liberal Radical Party. In recent years however, various other parties have challenged their dominance, and there are currently more than fifteen active political parties.

Lucio Gutiérrez, a former army colonel and popular activist, was elected to the presidential office in the 2002 elections with the support of various indigenous groups and left-wing political parties. When Gutiérrez took office in January of 2003, he faced a variety of problems, mainly a tradition of political corruption, a sinking economy, high national debts, and high poverty rates. During his presidency, Gutiérrez faced an attempted impeachment in 2004, as well as accusations that he was improperly using public funds. In an attempt to prove to accusers that he had not stacked the government with his own supporters, Gutiérrez dissolved the Supreme Court on April 15th of this year. However, this move backfired and resulted in mass civil protests. The National Congress deposed the president on April 18th, and two days later, vice president Alfredo Palacio was sworn in as the new president of Ecuador. (CountryWatch 2004 and Microsoft Corporation 1997-2005).

The three main issues addressed in the survey were the Base at Manta, the TLC (Tratado de Libre Comercio), and Plan Colombia. All three of these issues are currently affecting Ecuador. The Base at Manta is a military base in the coastal city of Manta that Ecuador leased to the United States in 1999, allegedly to help the United States in its fight against drug trafficking. During increased terrorism problems with neighboring Colombia in 2002, Ecuador firmly reiterated that the Manta Base is only to be used for anti-drug purposes, saying that the base has only been assigned such operations. While there has been opposition elsewhere in the government to Ecuador's commitment to the contract, which apparently holds until 2009, President Palacio has stated that it is Ecuador's responsibility to uphold its international commitments (Reuters 2005).

The TLC is an economic agreement signed last year by five Central-American nations (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic) and the United States. Like the ALCA (Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas) agreement, also known as the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas), the TLC is meant to increase economic integration among the countries in the Western Hemisphere. Many people in Latin American countries, including Ecuador, however, are opposed to

such agreements, saying that the conditions are unfairly in favor of the United States. Ecuador is currently a member of the ALCA agreement, and has recently solicited for membership in the TLC (EFE 2005 and FTAA 2005).

Plan Colombia is a U.S.-backed anti-drug and anti-terrorism initiative. Initially begun as an agreement between Colombia and the United States, Plan Colombia was meant to help the Colombian government regain control of its country (of which guerilla forces were in control of some 40%), to end the civil war, to eliminate the country's drug trafficking and its related crime, and to revive the national economy. In order to achieve these goals, the United States decided to launch a military campaign against the rebels. What has actually happened is that 80% of the money allotted to Plan Colombia (money from the U.S., international aid, and Colombia) has gone to Colombia's military forces, and only 20% has gone to other purposes, such as aid for the displaced, human rights, and the peace process. Another consequence since Plan Colombia was initiated is that the United States is constantly looking for new footholds in Latin America, such as Ecuador and the Base at Manta (Colombia Journal 2005).

The study sought to address two questions. One, whether or not Ecuadorians support the idea of Lucio Gutiérrez as their president and why, and two, how Ecuadorians feel about several key political issues facing Ecuador at this time. In order to answer the first study question, respondents were asked whether they had voted in the last presidential elections, who they had voted for, and whether or not they had agreed with Gutiérrez's government while he was president. In order to answer the second question, respondents were asked in the survey to answer yes or no as to whether they were in agreement with the three current issues addressed.

Methodology

The primary method used in this study was surveys, along with personal observation of respondents to validate survey answers (Appendix 2). The survey consisted of questions about general respondent information as well as political opinion questions. It was designed to be given to any individual of voting age. Certain survey questions were included in order to crosscheck the responses to previous questions.

The cities of Quito and Guayaquil were chosen as study sites because of their similarities in size and demographic makeup, as well as for their representation of the Sierra and Coastal regions, which were chosen because the majority of Ecuador's population resides in these two regions. Surveys were not conducted in any specific areas of these two cities, although the majority of surveys completed in Guayaquil were conducted at the Malecón 2000, and the majority of those completed in Quito were conducted in the Plaza de la Independencia and Parque El Ejido.

In lieu of staying in one location and soliciting people to take the survey as they approached me, I walked at a slow, steady pace around my different sites and approached people as I passed them. When I first approached someone, I either asked if they could help me with a few questions, or I simply started explaining that I was a student in

Ecuador, and because I was interested in what Ecuadorians think about their country's politics, I was conducting a survey. Then I said it would take about 2 minutes and asked if they would be interested in helping me out. I always explained that the information would only be used to write a paper for my class and would not be made public information. If the person was unsure at all, I offered to let them look over the questions, and if they still didn't want to complete the survey, they didn't have to. I also always invited the respondent to ask questions of me as well.

Prior to conducting any surveys, I intended to withhold my own personal information (such as where I was from) and opinions in order to not color their answers. This usually worked, but sometimes the respondent and I would get to talking while they were filling out the survey and I'd be forced to say more than "sí" or "claro".

I had no premeditated policy as to whether the respondent or I would fill out the survey, intending to hand them the survey and a pen so that they could write. However, for several reasons, I usually ended up writing. One, after handing someone the survey to look over before agreeing to participate, they would usually hand it back and start dictating answers. Also, whenever I asked if they would like to write, they would indicate that they wanted me to. Sometimes however, I wouldn't understand something that someone was dictating, and I would have to ask she or he to write it.

In general, surveys are an excellent way to gain information in a fast, informal manner. Their biggest flaw is that you can only gain so much information because the questions contained in surveys request specific, usually brief answers.

Results

Survey Conduction Results

Before conducting any surveys, I assumed that people, females especially, would be reluctant to talk to me. On the contrary, it was difficult to keep respondents on task with the survey questions, women as well as men. I spent an average of 10 to 15 minutes with most respondents, but a half an hour or more with several individuals.

The respondents most commonly approached were single, seated individuals. Such people were approached with the idea that they would be less in a hurry, less preoccupied, and thus more inclined to agree to complete the survey.

In both Guayaquil and Quito, it was not difficult at all to find people to ask to complete my survey. The primary site in Guayaquil, the Malecón 2000, took a good 25 minutes to walk from one end to the other, and the plazas and parks where surveys were conducted in Quito were also substantially large areas.

In all, 18 individuals refused to complete the survey. The reasons, and the manner in which they were given, were quite varied. Some individuals simply told me they didn't know anything about politics. Several others told me they didn't like politics. At one point, I approached a middle-aged man and asked him if he could help me with a question. He immediately replied "no". One elderly gentleman told me he was too old to have any opinions, while a middle-aged woman told me she didn't know what to think. Some individuals also told me they were in too much of a hurry.

Survey Data Results

In all, 33 people were surveyed. While it was intended to have an equal sample of the two target regions, it did not turn out this way. Of those surveyed, 58% were from the Coast, 39% were from the Sierra, and 3% were from the Amazon. Similarly, it was intended to have an equal number of male and female respondents, but 61% ended up being male, while only 39% were female. 18% of the respondents did not vote in the last presidential elections, and only 9% identified with a political party. The majority, 64%, was somewhat pessimistic in their belief that President Palacio would improve the country's situation, compared with 36% that thought he would be successful.

Tables 1 and 2.

	Pro-Lucio	Anti-Lucio
Primary 9% (3)	9% (3)	0%
Secondary 33% (11)	12% (4)	21% (7)
University 58% (19)	18% (6)	39% (13)

	Pro-Lucio	Anti-Lucio
Blue-collar	21% (7)	18% (6)
White-collar	15% (5)	42% (14)

The above two tables show the relationship between education and economic class. While those having completed only a primary education are not substantially represented, all of the individuals in this category supported Lucio Gutiérrez as president. Similarly, more individuals that had blue-collar jobs supported Gutiérrez than did not. Among those individuals that had achieved a higher level of education and had higher-paying jobs, the majority did not support Lucio Gutiérrez.

In terms of supporting Lucio Gutiérrez, the majority had at least supported him at the beginning of his presidency. The chart below shows the percentages of people that supported and did not support him as president, and the four most common reasons.

Table 3.

	Pro-Lucio	Anti-Lucio
Corruption/Falsity	3% (1)	24% (8)
Leadership/ Decision-Making	15% (5)	33% (11)
Peoples' President	18% (6)	0%
Political Peace/ Stability	3% (1)	0%

As the table shows, the most important reason for why people did not support the idea of Gutiérrez as president was his lack of leadership and decision-making skills. Those that did support Gutiérrez as president did so mainly because of the support he expressed for

the Ecuadorian people. There were several contradictions within the responses. For example, several respondents said that they did not favor Gutiérrez as president because he had maintained the tradition of corruption, while one respondent said that he or she *did* favor Gutiérrez as president because he had controlled corruption.

Tables 4, 5, and 6.

Manta Base	Pro-Lucio	Anti-Lucio
Yes	18% (6)	15% (5)
No	15% (5)	45% (15)
No Response	6% (2)	0%

TLC	Pro-Lucio	Anti-Lucio
Yes	18% (6)	21% (7)
No	18% (6)	36% (12)
No Response	3% (1)	3% (1)

Plan Colombia	Pro-Lucio	Anti-Lucio
Yes	9% (3)	0%
No	24% (8)	58% (19)
No Response	6% (2)	3% (1)

The above three tables show that those respondents that opposed Lucio Gutiérrez as president also opposed the Manta Base contract, and Ecuador's involvement in the TLC and Plan Colombia. Those that supported Gutiérrez were evenly distributed between supporting and opposing the three issues addressed.

Many respondents were inconsistent in their responses and opinions. For example, three respondents said that they had voted for Gutiérrez either in both rounds or only in the second round, and then responded that they did not agree with his government while he was president. One explanation for this is that they were responding as to how they felt at the beginning of his presidency, and their views changed throughout. Also, several respondents stated that they were opposed to Gutiérrez as president because of his corrupt politics and domination of the government, and yet these same respondents were in favor of the National Congress having the power to design the Supreme Court as well as the Constitutional Tribunal.

Discussion

Study Analysis

The survey results, while not proportionate to each other or to the sample size, demonstrated a wide variety of opinions, both concerning the Gutiérrez administration

and the three current issues addressed. The data in Table 1 in particular supports the fact that Ecuadorians that have a higher level of education are more likely to have opposed Gutiérrez and his policies. Table 2 in particular supports the fact that Ecuadorians with lower-paying jobs (and thus lower income) are more likely to have supported Gutiérrez because of his stated interest in helping poor Ecuadorians and supporting social works.

Prior to his election, Gutiérrez reiterated many times his presidency goals of cracking down on political corruption, diminishing the national economic and social debts, and enacting legislation to help the Ecuadorian people, especially the indigenous groups. Indeed, many survey respondents cited these as their reasons for supporting Lucio. However, the fact that over half of the respondents stated that they had opposed the Gutiérrez administration supports the fact that soon after his election, the president showed signs of not complying with his earlier promises. In accordance, many peoples' political opinions changed.

The Manta Base contract, the TLC economic agreement, and Plan Colombia are all issues that Gutiérrez was a proponent of. The fact that the majority of respondents were not supporters of Gutiérrez shows that they knew he supported these issues and thus voted accordingly. The result that those that *did* support Gutiérrez were neither strongly in support or strongly opposed to the issues suggests that the respondents did not see a strong connection between Gutiérrez's political platform and the issues.

There was one major bias within this study, which is how respondents were chosen to take the survey. First, people were approached as I walked past them. This means that the people surveyed were not chosen in any order or in order to fulfill any predetermined conditions. Second, people were only approached if I felt comfortable in doing so, both about their physical person and the physical surroundings.

In both of these components, the result is that the survey is not all-inclusive. It does not represent all groups of society equally, and certainly does not represent all possible viewpoints concerning either the Gutiérrez administration or the various issues that the survey addressed, regardless of the variety of opinions expressed in the surveys.

Personal Reflection

This project was much more about personal growth than about the actual data. While I had a wonderful time talking to people and hearing what they had to say, it was extremely difficult for me each time to actually approach people. (That's probably why I opted for surveys instead of interviews!) The project was good practice in two ways—doing surveys (interacting with people and having to be an expert of sorts on the subject when people had questions) and figuring out how to analyze the data.

Recommendations

This study could certainly be completed a second time, with a few changes. For two reasons, interviews would have been a much better methodology to choose. People were very willing to talk about anything concerning politics (and more!), and interviews

provide a lot more information than surveys. In addition, the same study covering a wider geographical range would also be much improved. A related study that could be conducted would be one addressing the political graffiti that is virtually everywhere.

Conclusion

One of the purposes of this study was to gain an understanding of how Ecuadorians felt about Lucio Gutiérrez while he was president. The majority of those surveyed, whether they voted for Gutiérrez or not, were both in agreement with parts of his government, and not in agreement with other parts. This finding was not reflected in the survey responses; rather it was noted during conversations with the respondents.

Similarly, it was difficult for most respondents to answer with a simple “yes” or “no” to questions concerning the political issues addressed. Most were inclined to respond that they were in agreement with the issues of the Base at Manta and TLC, or with Ecuador’s involvement in Plan Colombia, but with certain stipulations, such as more clearly stated contracts for the Base at Manta, or more equal trade agreements.

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